

Courage and Risk

Rahab

Text: The Book of Joshua 2:1-24; 6: 22-25

The Book of Joshua is the sixth Book in the Old Testament. It begins with the words 'After the death of Moses'. Joshua the son of Nun was a military leader who had worked closely with Moses. After the death of Moses Yahweh commissioned him to succeed Moses. Under Joshua's command the land that belonged to the Canaanites beyond the river Jordan was conquered (1:1-16). The conquered land was divided and later occupied by the 12 tribes of Israel.

Who was Rahab?

Rahab was a Canaanite woman who lived in her father's house which was situated in the Wall of Jericho that surrounded the city. She supported her extended family who lived with her. Rahab earned her living as a prostitute to provide for her mother, sisters and other family members. Her work would have kept the family out of debt. As a prostitute she would have met Israelite and Canaanite men. She would have had conversations that gave her information into the political and social events that occurred in Israelite society. It is possible that she knew who Joshua was and that he had plans to invade her country.

Re-telling Rahab's story: What follows is a retelling based on the biblical narrative. It is by reading into silences around events and the people in the text that this imagined creative reflection is written.

Rahab reflects: *It was late one evening when two men knocked on my door. I recognised them as Israelites though I hadn't met them before. I was uncertain when they said that they wanted to spend the night with me (2:1). My neighbours who also had houses inside the City wall like I did, would have seen the two men and realised that they were Israelites from their appearance. I took them in since I didn't wish to leave them standing outside my door. It didn't take long for someone to inform the authorities that I had two Israelite men in my home. The King of Jericho then sent men to my house looking for the two men. They shouted that I was harbouring spies and that I should bring them out. I was not intimidated by them. While they were still outside*

I hid the two Israelite spies by taking them to the roof of my house and hiding them under stalks of flax. I returned to the King's men and convinced them that two men had come by but that I didn't know who they were. I said that it was nearly time to close the City gate and that they should leave. I urged them to go after the two men quickly so that they could be overtaken. Thankfully they believed me and went on their way towards the Jordan river (2:3-7).

PAUSE, Reflect:

Rahab, the prostitute, took a risk when she protected the two spies.

Rahab, the carer, earned sufficient money to keep her family safe and free from debt.

Would we judge or relate to women like Rahab who are forced to earn a living as she did to survive or support family?

I returned to the roof where the spies were hiding. As we talked I shared what I knew of the history of Israel. I had learned a lot from the men who had become my clients. I talked of Moses and the safe path that the Lord had made through the Sea of Reeds for his people to flee from Egypt. I talked of the fear we had felt when news reached us that their people had killed two Kings of the Amorites. I then talked about my faith in the Lord who was their God; that I believed that the Lord God was God of heaven and earth (2: 8-11). As we talked I wondered if I was taking a risk in trying to make them believe that, though I was a Canaanite, I knew that the Lord God could be trusted in times of danger.

I took a risk again. I asked the spies to swear that they would deal kindly with me and my family when they invaded our land. I asked for a sign of good faith that we would be spared and be safe. The two men agreed to my request. They promised to deal kindly and faithfully with us when the Lord gave them victory over our land (2:12-14). Once we had negotiated their release I agreed to let them down with a red rope tied to a window. I urged them to run towards the hills and hide for three days so the King's men would not find them. They replied that should I betray them they would be released from the oath we had taken. They asked me to tie the red rope I was using to the window. They said that all my family should be in the house with me. If any of them were on the street when the Israelites came into the City, the oath would be broken and all of us would be killed. I remember the words I said to them, "According to your words, so be it." Then I tied the red rope to the window and let them escape (2:15-21).

Many years have passed since I helped the two Israelite spies to escape. I and my family are settled safely in a new home in Israel. The two spies had informed Joshua about us and the help we had given them. Joshua's armed invasion had been brutal. The wall of Jericho was destroyed. The red ribbon I had tied to our window kept us safe when the City was destroyed and all its people killed. (6:22-24).

REFLECTION:

Rahab's words of faith in God and the risks she took played a significant part in Joshua winning the war against the Canaanites. She was an independent woman of courage who protected her family from the violence of war. She was the outsider: as a prostitute, a woman, and a non-Israelite. Rahab is mentioned three times in the New Testament: in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-16. Hebrews 11:31. James 2:25.

Wars are fought across the world today. Chemical weapons, drones, men and women armed with high-powered weapons spread destruction and death. Cities are destroyed. Ideology, politics and power have become the invisible weapons of war from which there is often no escape for victims.

The human cost of war includes families trapped in war zones as much as those families left behind to wait and watch.

*Give me the courage, God,
to take risks when needed and to confront violence without fear.*